

TERM: Fall 2025

COURSE NUMBER & CATEGORY: ENGL 3100: Pre-1800 Literature

COURSE TITLE: Crisis and Criticism: Ecological Approaches to Early Literature

SECTION TIMES/DAYS: MWF 9:25-10:35 am

INSTRUCTOR: John Sebastian

COURSE DESCRIPTION/PRINCIPAL TOPICS:

To paraphrase Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the founding figures of ecocriticism, this course asks what it means to engage in literary study in an age of environmental crisis, with a focus on the first millennium of writing in English (8th-17th centuries). The course proceeds chronologically through three phases of literary development defined by changes in the English language itself (Old, Middle, and Early Modern English) and invites students to consider both canonical works (among them Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and Paradise Lost) and lesser-known texts from the perspective of nature. We will ask questions like: how is nature depicted in literary texts and deployed metaphorically? How does the tension between normative notions of nature and the artificiality of culture drive artistic production? Where can we seek the pre-modern roots of the current climate-change denial in, for instance, Christian mis-readings of Genesis and its emphasis on humankind's dominion over the earth or interpretations of the apocalypse? How did humans in previous eras respond to climate disasters through literature? How does the practice of ecocriticism intersect with other feminist, post-colonial, and other critical approaches to literature?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

TBA

CLASS LEVEL RESTRICTION:

Junior/Senior Only

RECOMMENDED/PREREQUISITES:

Select Recommended/Prerequisite Below

COURSE ATTRIBUTES:

OLD CURRICULUM

- GENRES (LD)
- HISTORIES (LD)
- AUTHORS (UD)
- CRITICAL/THEORETICAL (UD)
- COMPARATIVE (UD)
- CREATIVE/ARTISTRY

NEW CURRICULUM

- DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH (LD)
- HISTORY OF LIT, MEDIA, AND CULTURE (LD)
- READING AND WRITING GENRES (LD)
- THEORY, POWER, AND RHETORIC (LD)
- PRE-1800 (UD)
- CREATIVE ARTISTRY (UD)
- RACE, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND POWER (UD)
- UPPER-DIVISION ELECTIVE (UD)
- 5000-LEVEL SEMINAR (UD)

CORE ATTRIBUTES:

N/A